



**Savino Rivera, Sr.**  
Oral History Transcription  
October 8, 2018

Interviewed by: George Garner, Curator, Indiana University  
South Bend Civil Rights Heritage Center

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Transcribed by: Valeria Chamorro, Staff, Civil Rights Heritage  
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Summary: Savino Rivera, Sr. is an educator who worked  
for the South Bend Community School  
Corporation and also served as a track and field  
coach.

00:00:00 [George Garner] I'll start by saying that my name is George Garner. I serve as the service the curator here at the Indiana University South Bend Civil Heritage Center is Monday October 8th, 2018 and if you could please just state your name.

[Savino Rivera] Savino Rivera.

[GG] Savino I want to thank you, seriously for taking the time to do this. I want people to understand a bit about your life history. So, can you start just by telling me when you were born and where.

00:00:28 [SR] I was born in Marshall, Michigan May 7th ,1962. Had 11 siblings —8 sisters and three brothers. I'm the first... I'm right in the middle so the oldest boy. Five older sisters than me and my sister, then boy, girl, boy, girl. Parents were together. They separated when I was about like 7. My mom took us all on - all 11 of us from ages 14 at that time probably no... I would say from ages 10 to newborn, and we lived in Michigan. We did a lot of Migrant work. We worked in the tomatoes and strawberries, clean the onions, weeding the potatoes during spring break and during winter break.

00:01:32 I also worked it out in the barn with my mom and sorting and bagging the onions and the potatoes. In Michigan... then I moved here, and we started working at Barton Martin Brad farms and Snyder Farms like around Mayflower, doing the same thing. I did that work until I was probably 18 and once I graduated, I got my first CETA job working for the city giving out lunches at Mussel school, so that was a big difference of Labor I would say.

[GG] Just so people know when you say CETA job...

0:02:13 [SR] Yeah, it's the, I forget what it's called but it's the—it was sponsored by the city for the government and—I think I have to get back with you in that with the acronym of CETA. But I worked there for a year. Then after graduation I went on to Southwestern Michigan college where I started running track and cross country and ran there for two years and then transferred to IU Bloomington and finished my schooling there and majoring in Spanish.

[GG] Nice, um let's focus—so let's just start with that early childhood. So, you said you were on the migrant farm track. Where did you and your family travel?

0:03:13 [SR] We traveled when we were younger from - first we traveled from Texas to Oklahoma to... back Texas to Oklahoma and then worked our way up to Michigan. Then my dad found a job in a factory call Malibu steel... Steel Foundation where they made poured steel so then we

stayed there. Years later came home from school my dad was just gone. I was like where is he, my mom said well he left a note said he wasn't coming back. So, like I said pretty much all my life I grew up without a dad, all of us did. I guess I assumed the role as being the oldest boy to take on responsibilities and you know making sure the house is taken care of. Lawn cut, trash thrown out, maintenance, cleaning up and so forth.

0:04:22 My mother worked hard in the agriculture field, 6 to 6 everyday Monday through Friday half day, Saturday Six to noon. And my mom couldn't speak English, she couldn't write, at the time when my dad left she didn't have a driver's license so she had to learn how to drive, she had to learn how to maneuver the culture here in the United States and had to find a better life for us. Mom was very strict, she did not play, very strict with all of us. She was able to raise all eleven of us by herself, and we really did not do without, we didn't have much but we didn't do without. You know sometimes there's have and want, well we had what we needed. We didn't have what we wanted but we had what we needed.

[GG] Where was she born?

0:05:23 [SR] She was born in Mexico, my dad was also born in Mexico, they met in Texas and they became citizens in Texas. And that's where they met, married and then had all of us, then something happened went separate ways and then I hadn't seen my dad for probably until I was in, I don't know maybe my early forties. I happened to—my mother calls me and goes, hey I got the lucky numbers. I said what'd you do? Win the lotto? She said no, cause her brother had called her because he had called my Uncle Rudy and she had said well, here's the number If you wanna call him.

So, I called him, it was in November and I said well I was gonna come down, my son had just turned like... I think... ten. So, my wife and I, my son drove down that Thanksgiving cuz we were off for Thanksgiving break for Christmas... through school. So, we went down and when I first saw him in person what he started doing was crying and then he reached out and was going to shake my hand and I said just give me a hug. I haven't seen you in years. So that's what we started developing our relationship I started getting to know him a little more and that's what like, you know he tried to buy me everything, I said no I'm a grown man you don't need to buy me anything anymore.

[GG] Yeah.

[SR] You just don't have to.

[GG] Right, could you ever learn his reason for leaving?

0:07:28 [SR] No and I thought you know if I ask I'll just stir up old memories, but I thought I'd just leave that alone and start where we were at because, you know I told him I forgave him for whatever reason he had left. But it's not about what happened, and I told him it's about what's happening now. Building this relationship and where we're at now, because what was back then we can't go back to.

[GG] Right.

[SR] So, that's where we pretty much started at to where we're at now, so we have a pretty good relationship. I went back to Florida, came back went back to Florida, came back saw he's back, came back this year too. So...

0:08:12 [GG] Do you know—so you said when it was your mom and the rest of family that you were following the migrant farm track then eventually settled on Farm...

[SR] In Michigan.

[GG] In Michigan, and then at what point did you and your family settle in South Bend?

0:08:31 [SR] It was in 1973. April of 1973. My mom decided to come to Indiana, she met somebody... some friend and then came to Indiana. Rented a home here at Cushing Street. Kind of set back from the road but we lived there for a few years. Then my mother found another home it was a little bit bigger cuz that was like a two-bedroom. This one was a four bedroom, down the block at 540 North Cushing Street where she currently resides now. She bought it on land contract, it was like signed and said it make the payments monthly and once you pay it off its yours, so, she paid off the house.

It's her home, the uh—I could say that everything that she put into that home was through hard work, love and commitment that she worked in the—it was all through farm work, that was it. Farm work is not easy. It is not easy. I remember once during the winter I was working there for the two weeks when I was on winter break. They have these little, ever seen those little bag of onions like eight-pound bags of onions with the red net?

[GG] Yup.

0:09:56 [SR] Well they put on this machine that goes and it kind of goes like this fast. And it's got a little lever goes up and once it gets there it opens up the arms and once it hits it starts going down and it starts closing. Well you gotta be able to put the new bag on, grab the one that's filling up, spin it, put it through the stapler and she said let me go to the restroom, I said,

okay I'll take your place. There's about 15 bags on the on the floor cuz I couldn't keep up. I couldn't keep up at all (laughs). It was it was really hard work like I say that. I could say that out of the 25 people that are working there was only two people that could do it full speed—that was my mom and my sister Felipa, two. Any guy that they put there, they had to slow it all the way down, when they were working it was going like this—

[GG] Fast.

[SR] With guys they were going like this...

[GG] Super slow. (laughs)

0:11:04 [SR] I was one of them. Yeah, so I can say mama was a really hard worker. Any job there on the farm that she could do, she could do it and do it well, she never complained. She never ever complained.

[GG] So she—you're coming here in 1973. Living in the near northwest side at that point you know the farms on the near Northwest Side. At that point, the farms on the... west side around Mayflower... those were established for a long time and then Western Ave was just starting to become a center for Latinx immigrants.

[SR] Well, back then there was one Mexican store called La Mexicana and that was it.

[GG] Where was this?

[SR] Uh, on Western Ave.

[GG] Right.

0:12:00 [SR] I can't remember I think it's the Warren. I think it might be the side street that's there, but its right next to the bike shop, there was a bike shop there. But it was called La Mexicana, it was the only Mexican store in South Bend. Everybody would travel there to go there, and as you look at now, there's plenty of Mexican stores all over the place, restaurants, stores, you name it... taxes, barber shops, boutiques.

[GG] But that was not true when you first came...

[SR] That didn't exist when we first arrived. There was one store, and everybody came to that store. There wasn't a selection where you can go like to the mall, like "oh you got a big selection here". And that time it was just... speaking of the mall, it was just Scottsdale mall and that's it. There was no UP mall at the time. Roads have changed. There used to be one ways going back and forth, now its funneled in to two ways that I thought would never happen. The neighborhood where I grew up—

0:13:13 [GG] I was gonna ask you about that because at that point, so you're on Cushing Street which is on, just west of downtown in what we now call the Near Northwest Neighborhood which was now become predominantly African American, I think of the seventies it was probably predominantly African-American too, right?

[SR] Somewhat...

[GG] Tell me what was it like in the 1970s?

0:13:37 [SR] On Cushing Street I could probably count on one hand the African Americans, more of a Polish and the... I would say more of a white community where it was probably 10% African American and 1%... cause we were the only Hispanics on the block. I remember moving here and getting enrolled in the Colfax school. I come from [inaudible] School in Michigan and in Michigan I had never seen a black person before in my life. Just on TV. I tell the kids this. I remember watching Hercules movie and Hercules was holding up a big rock and it had a spike in it and his buddy was African American. But he was tied up on the rock. So, as he was getting tired the spikes started going into his chest and yellow blood started coming out. So, in my mind I was thinking that African Americans—as a kid, had yellow blood. So as a grew up I figured out that's not real, that was just TV.

[GG] (laughs) blood is blood.

0:14:46 [SR] Yeah, so coming into Colfax school was an eye-opening experience because I had—I was just around a white community in Michigan in the country, being bussed in and bussed back home. Coming into the city I walked to school because it was —

[GG] It was right there

[SR] Across the street. So, principal comes down, he's white, takes me in to register, my mom's with me, teacher comes down, Mr. Saxton takes me to class, we're walking... going to class. The shock to me was when I opened the door, there was one white student, one Hispanic student, and all African American students and I was like, "uh." I had never seen so many African American students in my life at one time. I don't know what I was thinking but with that experience I made a lot of good friends, the—just being the... you know when you get around different cultures, you're able to adapt to the different cultures and then I kinda say I'm a... what do you call it a—thing that fades into...

[GG] Like a chameleon?

0:16:20 [SR] Chameleon! That's what I was thinking, I could go into my professional world and be professional and I could go out in here and be street and then come over here and be with these friends and blend right in.

[GG] I think the word is code switching.

0:16:34 [SR] There you go, code switching. I remember I went to this conference, same thing happened to this gentlemen and he was coming down the elevator with his COE's and there was a custodian down there talking like the street and he didn't know how he was going to handle this because he was with all his COE's and then you know this guy is down here and he knew he was gonna say something to him.

[GG] Yeah.

[SR] So he just went on ahead and did his thing and it really explained it to then that he was able to blend in and still work with other people. It also helps in understanding where people come from because you know I coach track and one of my, one of my coaches you know we took the kids to do a community service at the food bank and we helped clean up, sort and pack boxes of food for people that were coming to pick them up. I remember him saying, "I never even knew this existed and how this helps people because I've never been through this." So, it was an experience and not even for him...for the kids. The majority of the kids knew this place.

[GG] Right.

0:17:48 [SR] The other kids didn't know this place, so it was a combination of both. So, it was an eye-opening experience for both sides. You got to be able to understand that not everybody has everything you have or have gone through what you have. Or other people have gone through. I don't know how you made it... I was... we recommend students through the GROUPS program - the first generation or lower income to IU Bloomington. So, I was—

[GG] What was the name of the program?

[SR] GROUPS

[GG] GROUPS.

0:18:30 [SR] So we're in—I had this student that was from Africa. He had to write an essay about perseverance, so as I was reading it because he wanted me to proofread it. I said okay. I had to stop because I was getting emotional because he said in the story... he was talking about how he

escaped the tribes that were trying to kill his family. And his father had gotten away and his mother and his little sister and his twin brother were mobbed. And he was probably about 12 and she was about 8.

So, they're trying to cross the river that had a rope and they were pulling, the mom was pulling, mom, the daughter was in the front and the two boys were on her shoulder and they were pulling. And the current got so rough that the twin lost hold of the mom and went down the river. And that's the last—all he could see was him going away and it was like, what would I do if I was in his shoes? Seeing my brother go, so the mother had to make a choice. Do I go after him and kill all the kids? Or do I go and have a better life with these two? So, she went across and it was really tough and—

0:20:06 [GG] That's the decision that a lot of migrant families particularly in the US have to make, right?

[SR] Yes. They come from Mexico. It's a lot of the economic status for the families there. It's very poor and a lot of people wonder why, "well why are they coming to the states?" Well, they want their children to have an opportunity because there's—the state where they're living in is so poor. I remember when I was there with my dad back in 1966 and 67. There was no electric. There was no running water. There was no toilet. So, one day I said, "well where am I gonna get the water from?" And they said, take this bucket—

[GG] (Laughs) right, there's a bucket...

0:21:07 [SR] And go down and go to town and right when you get into town there's a spot there you can get the water. So, I'm taking the two buckets and I'm like, I don't know. I go down and I ask, "where do I get the water?" He goes, "oh right there." And it was a pond full of like little fish I was like, "nah I'm not drinking this water." (laughs) So I just filled it up, took it, took it back I don't know what they did with it, but I was like "I am not drinking this water while I'm here." (laughs) And then as I got older, they said when you go to Mexico don't drink the water, so I get it now. I get it. But for so many years the living style and the culture of living in Mexico was very old in the way of doing things, everything was handmade, not very many cars—it was kind of like the Amish.

0:22:01 It was kinda like living like the Amish people, it was very interesting because we used to go there when my dad was with us. I remember going there four years in a row. We'd drive in a truck and we would all be in the back driving down to Mexico to visit his mom and his aunt and visit his family. We'd stay here for about six weeks during summer break. Then after he left, we never went back. It was then every summer was all about work now. So, no more visiting Mexico. Now it's all about working. But



what I did get from that is that my mother taught me to work - work hard and earn everything from the sweat of your forehead because trying to get something for free is not gonna last. Or trying to take anything will not last. Because you'll be looking over your shoulder every day of your life.

[GG] So those traditions that your mom and dad learned from where they were in Mexico. Did they transfer through to when you were growing up? And have you been able to transfer them to your children as well?

0:23:16 [SR] As—when I was growing up everything that my mom taught me has—is who I am today. Work hard and work hard every day, earn the money, earn the money from the sweat of my forehead. Don't take any shortcuts in life because I never was brought up that way. That's just something that was instilled in me as a kid. Every summer, every spring break, every winter break while all my friends in the summer riding their bikes, I'm working 6 to 6 and then they wanna come over and say, "hey let's ride," I'm like tired.

[GG] Right.

0:24:01 [SR] But you know it taught me how to respect, how to respect what I earn. How to spend and how to save. I remember my mother giving me \$20 a week. I used to make \$120 a week and my check went to her and she gave me \$20. Okay with that 20 bucks I went and bought shoes for school. The next week another 20 bucks. Okay a shirt, two pairs of shirts. Next week a pair of pants, T-Shirt, next week, socks, underclothes, so it was 20 bucks. That was it. That was my allowance.

[GG] And it had to last.

[SR] Yeah so, I either spend it on stupid stuff or I go and get something to wear for the next school year. So that's how I learned how to do that. I had to make decisions at a young age. What's more valuable? Candy, hanging out with buddies, going to a movie? Or having something to wear.

[GG] Right.

[SR] They didn't have to make that choice.

0:25:01 [GG] I'm thinking of school too. So, you mentioned that the principal was white at Colfax school. Were most of the... or all teachers white as well?

[SR] Most of them.

[GG] How did that play out? What did you, how did you feel? Did you feel that the teachers were receptive and responsive to students? Did you feel that they were more—how did you feel that teachers were able to interact with the students?

[SR] I could say that Mr. Saxton was a pretty good teacher. I mean uh... I mean I never really had one on ones with him, but he always addressed the class as a whole. I mean, not pull out individuals but he was always... addressed us as a whole, as a class.

0:25:55 [GG] So when you went to school by that point had you learned English?

[SR] Yes.

[GG] Where did you learn English from?

[SR] School.

[GG] Oh from school, the school in Michigan?

0:26:05 [SR] The school in Michigan, cause my home... my parents was nothing but Spanish. So, I grew up with my first language being Spanish and then once I entered kindergarten, I started to pick up the language of gringos. First, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth... I just picked it up. There was like—my second language. So, with that I remember this, clearly that I had a summer job just going back to my first year of college. I went to work in LaPorte, and I worked in a place that made cabinets and doors. I went and applied. It was one of my mom's friends that got me in. Just as a consultant work. I walked in and all one side was all white. And all this side were Hispanics and I was like, "why they got them separated." I was thinking in my head.

[GG] Right.

0:27:08 [SR] All these guys... half of them couldn't speak English and there was one guy that was in a group over here that could speak some English. So, they put me up over there and the guy who could speak somewhat English didn't want to teach me anything cause—he was thinking that I was taking his job. I was like I'm just here for the summer. I'm not gonna be here. So, with that they moved me over to the other side and I was—especially cause I could put out cabinets and my work ethic I was putting them out faster than the other guy.

So, they put me over there, one day the immigration comes in, so they come and get me, and I was wondering, 'why are all these guys running out of the building,' on the Hispanic side. I was thinking in my head. My boss came and got me and says some people wanna talk to you. I said okay, I went over and talked to them, they said "hola como estas?" I said well I'm doing okay what about you guys? They said, "where did you learn to speak English?" School. Where did you learn how to speak English? (laughs) So then they asked me where I was born, you know, what do you want? So, then they said okay go back to work and they left. I don't know

what they were looking for but that was my first head on meeting with the immigration and trying to question me on who I was, where I come from, how did I learn to speak English.

0:28:47 [GG] In spite of the fact that you had been born in the US, had been raised in the US—

[SR] They just looked at my appearance, what I looked like, not where I come from. I could have showed a birth certificate and they would have said, “where’d you buy that at?” probably. So —

[GG] Colfax School went through which grade?

[SR] Up to sixth grade.

[GG] So when was—what was after that?

0:29:10 [SR] Central. I went to Central High School, seventh and eighth grade because they closed it down after my eighth grade. Then I went to Brown that opened up in 1977. I went to Brown for one year and then I went to LaSalle for my last three years and graduated from LaSalle High School.

[GG] Gotcha

[SR] Now remember, my first year—all these, you know, say so I guess... that at the end of the school year there’s gonna be a riot, the black versus white, this and that. And I remember the last year couple days left of school, I’m walking in. I’m walking in through the front of the school through Central and there was like five or six African American dudes just wailing away on this bus driver, city bus driver. They were just punching at him and there was like racial riots after school and I never got involved in any of that, nothing ever happened to me.

0:30:07 I went to school the last day, I walked home, my sister and I but nobody ever did—nobody ever messed with us. We just went, left and it was more of the white and black communities that were at it. I mean they were going at it. I’m talking about you see blood, heads busted, face busted and just you just mind your own business and keep walking cause if not they’re gonna drag you through it.

[GG] Yeah. So, at Central this would have been the late 1960s, right?

[SR] At central it was 1973—

[GG] I’m sorry, I can’t hear you.

0:30:46 [SR] Yeah so 75. Yeah cause I, 73, 73-74, 74-75, so at 76 I was at Brown which was a little more—we walked to school every day and it was no

bussing like there is now. But there is—they never closed school, I don't care how cold it was or how high the snow. Only closed one year, it was 1978.

[GG] The blizzard.

[SR] The blizzard

[GG] Yes.

[SR] So that's the year that it was closed for about a week.

[GG] At LaSalle were you still one of the only Latino students or were you seeing more Latino students?

[SR] Two.

[GG] Two.

0:31:34 [SR] Two other families, the Delgado family and us that were there. Cause the ones that were when I was coming up dropped out. That was the Alvarez family. They just dropped out at 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I remember one, Emmanuel Perez, he... I was going into 10<sup>th</sup> grade, going to LaSalle. He said hey you should come out for cross country, so I did. Ran. He was there for about a week and then he quit and joined the army. So, he went on to the army and I was the only Hispanic on the team. So, every team that I was on I was the only Hispanic on the team. So, I ran cross country. I wrestled, and I ran track and that opened the door for me to go further my education.

[GG] Because then from there you were able to go to college.

0:32:27 [SR] Yes. And you know when I graduated high school, I didn't even know what I was gonna do. I didn't know what direction to go, I didn't... the counselors would... really didn't—there was a year that I had a counselor that just had graduated from college and was a first-year counselor at school, so I really didn't know him. I was able to complete my financial aid through one of my friends because he had done it and he showed me how to do it. My mom didn't know. Couldn't speak. Didn't know what was going on. So that was—my friend helped me with that. Then going to the school, they offered me a ride there. So that also helped. Other than that, I was just on my own at school. I was the first one to go.

[GG] So refresh my memory, it was Southwestern Michigan college that was the first?

[SR] Yes, South Western Michigan and then IU Bloomington.

[GG] So again, at Bloomington... did you find yourself among a lot of Latinx people?

[SR] Not like there is now. My son graduated from there and when I went to visit there, they even have like La Casa there that supports the community where it didn't even exist. In 1983, you could count on one hand the Hispanics there.

[GG] But you were able to graduate among—if not the first in your family to get a college diploma I presume or—

0:34:03 [SR] First to graduate High School and then college. But a couple of my sisters got pregnant but had gone back. My sister—one of my sisters just finished. She graduated and one of my sisters graduated and through her job she was able to pay for her schooling and got her degree that way. But that was later on in life, but yeah, they got opportunities so, so everybody's moving forward.

[GG] So what was your first job out of college?

[SR] I worked as a supervisor at a South Bend Stamping facility. So, I worked there, and I remember the older middle-aged people didn't respect me because I was like—you know, "you still have your milk around your mouth you're still like 22, and you're trying to tell me what to do?"

[GG] Right.

0:35:02 [SR] I said, I'm not trying to tell you what to do. I'm just following the instructions of what the activity. We produced the day and shipped out the day... by the end of the day. So, its... I learned how to communicate with the people there so by being able to communicate with them it enabled me to have more of a successful production line because I was able to work with them and not look at them as robots. Look at them as people. So, I developed that skill and it worked well for about 12 years. Then it closed down and then I went to apply for bilingual services. And once I applied for bilingual services the director there was Maritza Robles, she says to me, "I was wondering when you were gonna come and apply."

[GG] (laughs)

0:36:01 [SR] I said, well I'm here. So, she hired me, it was a—I worked with uh, at Harrison—old Harrison, with third graders and then I had a reading group of first graders. So, I did that for two years and then she moved me over to Green Intermediate—Green School out on Roosevelt. So, when I moved out there, I became an educator specialist—before I was an instructional resource to the teacher. Then I went to education specialist and worked out there for two and a half years. And then Maritza calls me and yeah

goes, “hey I have an opening at a high school that’s right down the road from your house.” I thought about it you know, she gave me the opportunity, so I didn’t say no. I said I’ll go. First day of high school I’m walking through the halls listening to the conversations and I said to myself, “what did I get myself into?”

[GG] So which high school is this?

[SR] John Adams.

[GG] Adams.

0:37:06 [SR] So there was like pushing around, nobody says excuse me. Nobody says I’m sorry. Everybody was like cussing and there was a couple fights that day. But it was really blown up in the newspaper because reading the newspaper and then reading... cause I was in the building. This is not what’s happening. So, it was kind of blown out of proportion.

[GG] So what you saw in the building was—yes there was language. Yes, there were some altercations but then that gets blown out of proportion—

[SR] Well the reason why was because they closed down LaSalle, so LaSalle kids had to come to Adams and to Clay. They split them up. But that was—that happened in 2000 so—

[GG] That was after plan Z which was trying to realign the—trying to realign schools to make them more—

[SR] Right

[GG] Yeah.

0:38:10 [SR] So, with that there was a gentleman there that... the head specialist and I asked the kids well do you know “so and so” and then he said, “no I’ve seen him around, but I didn’t know why he was here.” So, I told the kids, well there’s gonna be a change. I’m gonna be in this building and you’re gonna know who I am and we’re gonna start going in the right direction. Cause we have a lot of students that are bright, a lot of students that don’t know the way and how to get to the next level with their education. And I know your parents don’t know because my mom didn’t know. And knowing that my mom didn’t know, and I know how your mom is going to feel. I’m going to be your voice in this building I can either be your best friend or I can be your worst enemy.

What’s that mean? Well if you’re a bad student, skip school - just cause problems and you’re always going to come and see me because you’re always gonna be dealing with me. And I’m going to give you the three strikes. Strike one we’re gonna talk about it. Strike two it’s gonna be me

and your parents. Third time we're gonna be signing your withdrawal forms and I mean it was like you had to—you have to do what you say because kids will try you. And they found out that I wasn't a pushover. So, I remember telling this one kid if I ever catch you driving this—your car without a driver's license and you're taking kids from school I'm going to have your car towed away right where it's at.

0:39:58 Two weeks go by, he's outside picking up kids. Call the police officer. I told him what's going on. He went out there got them out of the car, they call the tow truck. Gone. After that nobody else did anything again. They already knew. The word went out that I wasn't playing. I also told him that, you know these kids, I'm gonna treat you like you're my own. If I'm not gonna let my son get away with it, you're not getting away with it. Believe me, you're not gonna get away with it.

[GG] For... so when you were doing this with primary school students and elementary school students, were—I'm presuming most of the students that you worked with were the children, were relatively new to the US and—

[SR] I worked with all the levels... zero to four.

[GG] What does that mean?

[SR] Proficiency levels

[GG] Oh.

[SR] So with the proficiency level five it would be like you and I talking. A level three is kinda talking but—

[GG] Broken?

0:41:09 [SR] Yeah, level two varied and level one you're looking at me and just smile. So yeah, it's just working with all the students. We had EL classes from K through six. So, I was the liaison between the parent, the teacher, the administrators and the student. So, I'd discipline the student at times, I'd call parents, I'd interpret. I had to translate papers. Every Thursday teachers would send me their notes to go home. Sometimes they were here, sometimes they were there, and I'd translate everything and put it back in their box so they could communicate with the parents who didn't speak English at home.

[GG] Right.

[SR] So I'd make phone calls for them, whatever they needed. I took care of it.

[GG] And so within those—so there were separate classes for students who were somewhere between zero and five, right?

[SR] Yes.

[GG] I mean tell me, for those who don't know, walk us through what that classroom looks like. How are students—is the goal to get everybody to a five in English proficiency?

0:42:22 [SR] It is. It's a goal to get them to five because you have, you have people from Africa, from Iraq, Vietnamese, from Honduras, from El Salvador, Guatemala, from Mexico. And just because I speak Spanish it's not the same dialect so—

[GG] They speak Spanish doesn't mean they speak the same Spanish.

[SR] Yeah, one word could mean one thing. Yeah, it's good. But you say it to the Puerto Rican, you're insulting them.

[GG] Right.

[SR] So, I mean I lot of visuals, a lot of repeating because you have like five different languages in there and they're at ground zero. I'm trying to get them to pick up the English language. The little kids pick it up a lot quicker than the older kids, but studies say it takes about three years for them to be a level 3.

[GG] When you got to the high school was it still working with people who had—

[SR] Yes

[GG] Little to no proficiency?

[SR] John Adams was the only LEP school.

[GG] LEP? Do you know what that stands for?

0:43:26 [SR] Language English proficiency. [inaudible] learn English. And back in the day used to call it ESL, English as a second language. Then it went to English as a new language, now its LEP. So, working with the students there we're able to build a lot of bridges for them to exit from where they thought they were just gonna graduate and go to work but now they're graduating and go to college and we were able to open those doors for them. Through the bilingual services. Take them to college visits, exposing them to financial aid, SAT, ACT—preparing them for that.

[GG] All the things you didn't have.



[SR] No, I didn't and there was not one person that went out of their way to say, "you have to take your SAT." Nobody told me about that. So, it was like, I had to learn from my friend cause he asked me, "did you take your SAT?" What's that? So, then I had to apply—they didn't know about the waiver if you're on low income. Free or reduced lunch, both fees being waived. They didn't know about that until we exposed them to that. So, they're able to understand all of that as they come in so after a while a lot of kids wanted to come to Adams. So, it's something that—I took that job very serious and it was something that I enjoyed. And I still remember a lot of the kids that went through there.

0:45:15 The good ones that did what they're supposed to do they went on a college, they're successful, got great jobs now. The ones that came because they wanted to work—so we got in the Building Trades now they're making \$20-30 dollars an hour, welding, doing hands on jobs. And had a group that was the ones that were really a little tougher to break through, we got—didn't get all of them cause I remember my boss Maritza says that, she told me she goes, "you're not going to save them all you, you'll exhaust yourself before that happens." And that was true I was trying to save everyone. But you're not going to, they have to want to save themselves.

[GG] Was that hard?

[SR] It was because you know sometimes you take those emotions with you and the—you take the emotions with you and you just see what these kids are going through and you're trying to get them over that barrier and some of them succeed and others try very hard and its just—its life changing.

[GG] Tell me more about working with Maritza.

0:46:41 [SR] Maritza was a very direct, strong individual. What she said goes. But she gave me the opportunity to become who I am at my job. Because if it wasn't for her to give me this opportunity to work for her I would, I wouldn't be sitting here today. She gave me the opportunities, she opened the door for me. She gave me opportunities to lead summer school, to develop myself and develop myself into a leader. To take that role and to run with it. I remember we were talking... I was in the primary center working summer school - 4th grade and then she had mentioned that she was having some issues over at the intermediate with the person running it.

So, I gave some suggestions and then next thing I know I'm over there running it. (laughs) And she supported me 110% on and what decisions that I was making there. And with her support I felt more confident and I started just growing in in that... in that position. That took me out to

Adams with that position. I remember there was a situation there and I told her about it and she says, “do you want me to come there? I can come right now and support you on it.” And I said no, I think I can handle it, you taught me well. She says, ‘okay, but if you need anything just call me, I’ll be right there.’ And that was just the one thing about her, she always had your back, always, no matter what. I - since she was a very good boss, my, my—she was a very good director and anything that I needed or any guidance that I needed or anything that I needed to do with the kids, she was at full support.

[GG] At all the various schools, you know, did you find yourself again among one of the only Latino staff members?

[SR] As a male yes.

[GG] More Latina?

0:49:10 [SR] Yes, there was a—well, there was about three or four of them. But in the primary, there was more women there opposed to—I was the only male Hispanic there. I remember that when I was at Harrison in third grade, I remember this young man and I didn’t know what to say when he said this to me. He goes ‘Mister’, and I said, ‘what’s going on?’ He says, “I wish you were my dad.” That just killed me, you know. Like wow, a third grader. So, you know stuff like that you just don’t forget, stories that you read essays. Watching this kid come from zero English to passing the ISTEP, math and English. Scoring high on SATS. I mean coming here with no English and scoring 1600 on SATS. And you’re at level four. I mean, that’s just some of the things you see, and you say, man that’s—it’s all worth it.

[GG] Its life changing.

[SR] Yeah.

0:50:25 [GG] I’m thinking too about some of the interactions with the other teachers cause of course systemic racism in the schools is a thing. Was that part of your experience? So, as you’re translating back and forth, as you’re hearing from students, are you hearing experiences of um, racist incidents among teachers to students? How was that interaction for the most part?

[SR] Well, I heard that—the most popular one was ‘you can’t speak Spanish in my class.’ Well sometimes you have to because if you’re level one and then you have a level four sitting right next to him, he’s going to interpret what the teacher saying and then you don’t want him to speak Spanish?

[GG] You're literally tying one arm behind the back of that student's success.

0:51:22 [SR] Right, so it's at times that's where we—myself would go and talk to the teacher about it and just say, 'this is what is going to happen, what we're trying to do and how we're gonna be able to help this kid.'

[GG] So were you empowered to be able to tell that teacher your rule is not okay? And that teacher—or was it more of a—did you have to—

[SR] We went to administration.

[GG] You could go to the administration.

[SR] Yeah.

[GG] And did you get support from the administration?

[SR] Yes.

[GG] That's good. That's not always the case.

0:51:56 [SR] Yeah, I was... well the staff that I worked with at Adams were very supportive. I knew all the teachers there and all the custodians by name because I'm just that type of person. I want to get to know you and I want to see you and say hey how you doing Joe, how you doing Jenny, how you doing, I don't wanna just say hello. So, we had about a hundred staff and I know all of them by name. And just like my kids, I knew them all by name. Cause I remember a friend of mine telling me when I took over the position as a education specialist, "You're gonna need to know all your kids, their names, where they're at as far as grades. Because when Maritza comes, she's gonna ask you about a student and you better know it." I said okay, that was my only tip, so I remember I was walking on hallway with one of my African students and we're walking through the hallways during the passing periods. And I was speaking to all the kids that I work with by name and then he asked me, 'Mister, you know all of them by name?' I sure do. I know them all by name. That was just something for me to pick up and it's something that me as a person I would want somebody to call me by name than just say hey, hey you. So, I wanted to be able to respect them the way I wanted to be respected. Because I didn't know if they were able to get that at home or wherever they're at, but I wanted to build that bridge through them and I.

[GG] Are you still at the school corporation?

0:53:35 [SR] I'm still at the school corporation but under another title—I'm the IDNR recruiter, I work with migrant families now. So, I go out and recruit

and work with the families and identify them and once I identify them, our wider regional service center comes out and provide services for them.

[GG] How long have you been doing that job?

[SR] I've been with the migrant program, I'm going on my 5th year.

[GG] Okay.

[SR] But as far as recruiting, I was the project manager before. Then I went into recruiting in the settlement over a year-and-a-half now. Maybe a year and three months that I've been a recruiter.

[GG] Have you seen any changes in the past five years in that?

[SR] As far as?

[GG] Um, given the current... given the current political climate and what we're seeing—some of the horrible things that we're seeing. Is that being reflected in the...

[SR] Yes.

[GG] Is that being reflected in—

0:54:35 [SR] It is. Now it's more of a—the workers that used to travel more, the migrant workers that would travel from down south to up north are scared to drive because of ICE. So, that's—a lot of them are not coming. So, what the farmers are doing now they're going into the H2A workers that they hire, that they have to pay to come ship them here and send them back from Mexico to Guatemala, or El Salvador, down in Latin American countries. I've seen a lot of them come from—more of the Africans that are coming from Florida coming here to work. A lot of those guys that are the Africans have like degrees and master's degrees that are coming here to do the work cause there's no work where they're at. So, a lot of the ones that are coming here from the Latin community are coming here just single men coming here to work, 19-year olds to 60-year olds, that range come here to work.

[GG] What services are you able to provide for some of the children.

0:55:59 [SR] Children—provide dental, hearing, vision services. Backpack supplies, school supplies. We provide tutoring, uniforms, technology -

[GG] All the things you didn't have.

[SR] All the things yeah—so we're bridging the gap in their education at what they don't have to be able to keep up with somebody that does have it, to be successful.

[GG] Through your time here—so there were a number of organizations in town that worked with the Latinx community and I'm thinking La Casa De Amistad. I'm thinking of El Centro. I'm thinking LULAC. Were you a part with or affiliated with any of those organizations?

[SR] When we first moved here, we were a part of the LULAC, my sisters were very involved in it.

[GG] Tell me more about that.

0:56:43 [SR] That's when it was first coming up in the seventies. La Casa De Amistad was starting to form under Mr. Salazar—Benito Salazar. Under his guidance and there was more of a—the west side community involved in it and we were more of the north side. My sisters were more involved in it - in the singing, the get togethers, the study tables and so forth. But then as I got older and branched out and it was... I didn't need it much anymore. So, I just started moving along with my life. I believe I would have... if I lived over on the West side, I probably would have been more involved in it. But I—it was a solo travel for me to get there, for us to get there.

[GG] Is there anything from your life for your experience that I didn't ask you that you feel is important?

[SR] Well, I'm married and have two sons and a daughter. I have—let's see...

[GG] You said at least one was able to IU Bloomington.

0:58:11 [SR] Yes, my youngest son went to IU Bloomington, both my daughter and my son graduated from high school and my oldest son went to a tech school and he is a robotic repairman in Niles. So, he's doing very well and my daughter's the director of Growing Kids over here on Ireland. And my youngest son was at Adams, but he left there and now he's at Beacon health and doing what he likes to do, community outreach. He likes to help the community, he's very involved. Yeah. Other than that—that's about it.

[GG] Well, again thank you for taking the time and thank you for sharing that story, I appreciate it.

0:59:10 [SR] Oh not a problem.

[End tape]